

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 6487

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OREP (YATRON-WOLFF), CI SHUM
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS AND CODELS: PROBLEM OF MISSING PERSONS

1. SUMMARY: SOME RELATIVES OF PEOPLE ALLEGEDLY SPIRITED AWAY BY CHILEAN SECURITY SERVICES HAVE APPROACHED THE EMBASSY REQUESTING AN OPPORTUNITY TO MEET WITH CODELS YATRON AND WOLFF. WE HAVE BEEN NON-COMMITTAL BUT PESSIMISTIC BASED UPON THE CODELS' HEAVY SCHEDULES. THE PROBLEM OF THE CHILEAN "DISAPPEAREDS" IS HIGHLY CHARGED, WITH POLITICAL AS WELL AS HUMANITARIAN ANGLES. TAKING PRO'S AND CON'S INTO ACCOUNT, WE RECOMMEND THAT A CODEL STAFFER(S) AND EMBASSY OFFICER MEET WITH A SMALL GROUP REPRESENTING THE FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS. END SUMMARY.

2. BETWEEN LATE SEPTEMBER 1973 AND DECEMBER 1976 BETWEEN 500-800 PEOPLE DISAPPEARED IN CHILE UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES POSSIBLY INVOLVING THE SECURITY SERVICES. (THERE HAVE BEEN TWO SIMILAR CASES IN 1977.) MANY RELATIVES OF THESE PEOPLE HAVE GROUPED THEMSELVES UNDER AN UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION WHICH, ALTHOUGH NOT DIRECTLY RUN BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S VICARIATE OF SOLIDARITY, DRAWS UPON THE VICARIATE'S LEGAL AND RESEARCH RESOURCES AND BY AND LARGE ENJOYS ITS SUPPORT. WE HAVE NO REASON TO IMPUNE THE MOTIVES OF THE MAJORITY
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OF THE PEOPLE ASSOCIATED WITH THE RELATIVES' ORGANIZATION: THEY ARE IN THE CRUEL POSITION OF NOT KNOWING WHETHER THEIR NEXT OF KIN ARE DEAD OR ALIVE. WE ALSO KNOW, HOWEVER, THAT SOME AMONG THEM, PARTICULARLY THE COMMUNISTS AND RELATIVES OF COMMUNISTS, SEE IN THE "DISAPPEARED" PROBLEM A VULNERABILITY THAT THE GOC CANNOT OVERCOME. FOR HARDBOILED POLITICAL REASONS THEY

SEEK TO KEEP DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION
RIVETED ON THIS SUBJECT.

3. DURING VISITS BY SENIOR USG OFFICIALS IN 1976
AND DURING THE OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY THIS JUNE, THE
ORGANIZATION UNDERTOOK HEADLINE GRABBING ACTIVITIES
SUCH AS THE HUNGER STRIKE AT SANTIAGO-BASED
ECLA. FOR ITS PART, THE GOC HAS DEVOTED CONSIDERABLE
EFFORT TO DEPICTING THESE ACTIVITIES AS A COMMUNIST-
INSTIGATED "SHOW".

4. HALF A DOZEN RELATIVES HAVE ALREADY COME BY THE
EMBASSY TO INQUIRE ABOUT POSSIBILITIES OF MEETING WITH
THE CODELS TO PRESENT THEIR PROBLEMS FACE-TO-FACE.
THEY INCLUDE SOME WHOSE POLITICAL MOTIVATION SEEMS CLEAR
(COMMUNISTS AND OTHERS) AND SOME VETERANS OF THE ECLA STRIKE.
WE HAVE HEDGED, NOT WANTING TO INVOLVE ANY OF THE
CODEL IN THIS CONTROVERSIAL NO-WIN SITUATION. WE
HAVE, OF COURSE, PROMISED THAT ANY DOCUMENTS OR
PETITIONS THEY GIVE US WILL BE TRANSMITTED TO THE
CODELS BY EMBASSY OFFICERS.

5. ON THE OTHER HAND, WHATEVER THE MOTIVATION OF THE ACT-
IVITISTS AMONG THE RELATIVES, THE FACT REMAINS THAT HUNDREDS
OF PEOPLE SINCERELY BELIEVE THAT ONLY BY BRINGING
THEIR PROBLEM TO THE ATTENTION OF FOREIGN VISITORS
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AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE CAN THEY HOPE TO EVENTUALLY
FIND OUT THE FATES OF THEIR KIN. FOR HUMANITARIAN
REASONS ALONE, WE BELIEVE A PERSONAL CONTACT WITH
SOMEONE IN THE CODEL IS APPROPRIATE.

6. EMBASSY RECOMMENDATION: WE SUGGEST THE DEPART-
MENT INFORM THE CODELS OF THIS SITUATION. WE
SUGGEST THAT A STAFFER(S) AND AN EMBASSY OFFICER
MEET WITH 5-10 OF THE RELATIVES AT THE EMBASSY OR
ON NEUTRAL GROUND TO RECEIVE THEIR DOCUMENTATION
AND DISCUSS THE SITUATION WITH THEM. WE BELIEVE
A LARGE, PROMINENT CODEL CONTINGENT WOULD PLAY
INTO BOTH GOC AND OPPONENTS' HANDS.
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